

Thinking With My Friends and Family

Video: Electronic Communication: Picture Perfect

With hopes of staying more connected with her grandparents, Maria's family recently purchased a new webcam for their home computer. However, before they attempt their first video chat, Maria's best friend, Abby, advised her to try a few strategies for having an engaging and successful chatting experience. Abby said that she and her mom did not practice before their first chat and things did not go well at all. Maria was thankful to have this information before talking with her grandparents.

Now it's your turn to practice and prepare for a video conferencing experience. Try one, or more, of the following strategies to improve your ability as an electronic communicator:

1. Make a "Conferencing Checklist"

- List all of the steps that you should go through before starting to communicate digitally. Be sure to include the steps that apply to your specific situation. Keep the list handy and add things to it as you become more experienced.

2. Hold a dress rehearsal

- Before a video conference, practice with a friend who lives in your own town. This will allow you to easily communicate face-to-face about the practice session. By practicing with the equipment, environment, and message you will be confident when the real event happens.

3. Concentrate on listening

- Be sure to remember to use Active Listening skills when communicating digitally. Work to focus on the speaker, think about what is being said, respond verbally and non-verbally. Always recognize that interrupting can interfere with the communication process.

4. Agree on a signal

- When practicing with another person, agree on a visual signal to use to let your partner know that you are ready to make a point. Lift your hand up or raise and wiggle your index finger. This way you don't have to interrupt what they are saying but they can tell that you have a point to make. The non-verbal signs that we pick up on when we are in the same room with someone can often be lost with electronic communication.